

March 3, 2016

To the members of the Public Health Committee of the CGA:

I am writing in support of H.B. No. 5271 - An Act Concerning Mental Health Training in State and Local Police Training Programs and the Availability of Providers of Mental Health Services on an On-Call Basis with the enhancements listed below.

This is one of the issues that my colleagues and I have been concerned about for some time. We have voiced our opinions regarding unnecessary force used by many police officers, sometimes leading to loss of life. About half of the people killed by police (over 1,000) across the nation last year suffered some type of mental health issue or were experiencing a crisis; most of these were guilty of no crime and only a danger to themselves. In fact a good number of the cases were suicide interventions. Every day someone in crisis or with mental health issues is injured or killed by a police officer who lacks the appropriate training or skills to de-escalate a situation they are called to. Some of the calls are initiated by family or friends who reach out looking for assistance or crisis intervention. I'm sure there are so many more cases that we never hear of but I'll mention just a few of the ones I know about:

Tanisha N. Anderson, of Cleveland, went limp in a police cruiser as they were transporting her to a hospital for a psychiatric evaluation. Tanisha was just having a bad day when her family called 911 to get her some help. She panicked after she was in the cruiser and tried to get out but was forcefully restrained by the officers – she ended up dead. <http://www.newsnet5.com/news/local-news/cleveland-metro/woman-dies-in-cleveland-police-custody>

Caroline Small was a mom and a college student dealing with some mental health issues – the cops cornered her car and shot her after a car chase ... they said they feared for their safety. No attempt made to save her life was made. See the story here: <http://investigations.myaajc.com/caroline-small-shooting/>

Christopher Torres was a schizophrenic and was home with his parents when officers jumped a fence to confront him in his back yard over a road rage warrant. He was shot and killed by Albuquerque officers. <http://www.abqjournal.com/413552/news/judge-awards-6-million-to-family-of-man-shot-by-apd.html>

Noel Mendoza told officers that he had eaten drugs when he drove into the Meriden police department parking lot seeking help. He did become combative and officers used the Taser on him. He was taken to Midstate Hospital where he died. <http://fox61.com/2013/06/11/man-who-died-after-being-shocked-with-taser-had-extensive-criminal-record/>

Danielle Jacobs, a young woman with Asperger's had once called Arizona the "worst mental health system across the U.S." Apparently the criminal justice system is just as bad because when she was suicidal, instead of de-escalating the situation, the police shot her to death. Danielle had made videos of herself months before showing how her service dog could calm her down during her "self-harm and meltdowns". Mesa, Arizona police confirmed that Jacobs, 24, was the woman shot dead by officers responding to a suicidal-person call at her home <https://www.veooz.com/news/GKNDV5M.html>

Linwood Lambert was making noise at a hotel and someone called the police. They were taking him to the E.R. for an evaluation due to his erratic behavior but when he started running outside the hospital the officers used the Taser on him repeatedly. They decided to take him to the station instead of bringing him into the hospital but he died during the ride.

<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=lambert+died+after+tasers+used+by+police&view=detail&mid=0EECC2932E35E6A25E9D0EECC2932E35E6A25E9D&FORM=VIRE>

With the 'war against the poor' in full swing many of our nation's most vulnerable are victims of biased policing. Many homeless individuals are also dealing with mental health issues; often they are unnecessarily arrested, injured or even killed by police. One such man known as "Africa" was killed by L.A. police over the removal of his tent. See more at:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/01/lapd-fatally-shoots-homeless_6780810.html

James Boyd, another homeless man, this time in Albuquerque, is shot while half dozen other officers who were trying to talk him into coming down the mountain just watch. He's then cuffed and left bleeding to death while they search his camp on the mountainside.

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/12/us/albuquerque-police-murder-charges/index.html>

Meagan Hockaday was in crisis, we don't know the history of this couple but it was a domestic violence situation. Her boyfriend made the call and asked Oxnard, CA police to intervene but they shot her dead within seconds of entering the apartment. She was holding a knife in her hand but wasn't even told to drop it before shots rang out killing her in front of her 3 young children. She may have been holding the knife in self-defense for all the officers knew. She posed no threat to the police and was standing with her back towards them, oblivious to their entrance. Meagan was only 26 and deserved a chance to live; she would have had that chance if a trained professional had been present to de-escalate the situation. Meagan did not have to die at the hand of that officer and now her children have to live with that image in their memory.

<http://www.bet.com/news/national/2015/04/01/meagan-hockaday-shot-and-killed-by-police.html>

Although it may have been futile, attempts at first aid or interventions to save any of these victims were absent as we see in many police interventions where parties are injured. This failure to provide medical attention when warranted is a dereliction of duty and should not go unpunished.

After much thought and consideration we came up with a few recommendations that can make a big difference. I drafted language and forwarded the proposed Meagan Hockaday Act.

While many states or cities claim they do not have funds to pay for the CIT program, we are proposing an even better alternative ... that of having mental health/law enforcement triage patrol teams. Sending out an officer with the previously recommended 30 hours of CIT training would help but models like those in Hamilton and London are proving even more effective. Having a psych nurse, licensed clinical social worker, or other credentialed person on the ride would allow the individual access to other services they might need. Larger cities might need a couple people on call thru our numerous mental health institutions. There are so many lives to be saved with the proper interventions vs. attempted detainment or a violent arrest. The sight and calming voice of a helping figure vs. that of law enforcement could have saved many lives

included that of Meagan Hockaday. Instead we have her 3 children, left traumatized and motherless.

Recommendations:

- 1) A CT Task Force should be established to study these Triage Patrol initiatives and compare it to whatever training programs may currently be in place at this time. CT Departments should adopt policies regarding triage patrols and nonlethal methods of subduing mentally ill individuals and people in crisis.
- 2) Dispatch will need more training in how to screen incoming calls and in cases of domestic violence, suicide threats, drug overdose, or other crisis intervention calls the police officers responding should be accompanied by a mental health professional who should take the lead in de-escalation and resolution attempts. Police officers should intervene if there are no other alternatives and with the goal being that no one is injured. Those needing safe shelter should be accommodated, those needing only detox services should be provided access without resulting criminal charges, other health related crisis should be attended to at the closest hospital's Emergency Room. If legislators deem this unworkable then the 30 hour CIT training should be part of the Police Academy standard training and a 4 hour yearly refresher course should be required.
- 3) Dispatch should find out if children are present before sending officers to these types of calls and a mental health professional should be called in to remove the children from the situation. Police officers should refrain from physically restraining, or injuring a parent or caregiver in the presence of minors. Officers who use excessive force on mentally ill individuals or people in crisis, especially when children are present should face criminal penalties. If a parent is shot by a police officer in front of their child, the officer who commits this crime should be charged with risk of injury to a minor, at minimal. There have been numerous cases publicized where children are killed by officers pursuing others. Those officers should minimally be charged with negligent homicide.
- 4) Free counseling should be provided to surviving victims and the secondary victims, (immediate family/loved ones of victims) of excessive use of force by police.
- 5) If all else fails and an officer ends up injuring someone during an arrest or intervention they should be duty bound to provide first aid or to call for emergency medical assistance and not leave them bleeding or convulsing after being shocked.

I know this is a lot to ask of our CT officers, especially since many other states have much worse track records. I want to believe that our officers value all lives and I know these recommendations will save lives. We can be proactive and be a model state for the nation.

Thank you so much for listening & May God guide you in your service to the residents of CT.

Mary L. Sanders
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Community Party Member